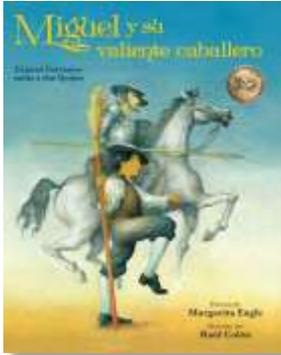


AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



Teresa Mlawer and Georgina Lázaro on *Miguel y su valiente caballero*

A fictionalized first-person biography in verse and in Spanish, *Miguel y su valiente caballero* follows the early years of the child who grows up to pen *Don Quixote*, the first modern novel. The son of a gambling barber-surgeon, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra looks to his own imagination for an escape from his family's troubles and finds comfort in his colorful daydreams. At a time when access to books is limited and imaginative book are considered evil, Miguel is inspired by storytellers and longs to tell stories of his own. When Miguel is nineteen, four of his poems are published, launching the career of one of the greatest writers in the Spanish Language.

Spanish translators Teresa Mlawer and Georgina Lázaro share their experience translating *Miguel's Brave Knight* and explain the importance of translating literature for children.

Q: What are your own connections to Cervantes's story of *Don Quixote*?

Teresa: My own connections to Cervantes's story of *Don Quixote* go back to when I was a child growing up in Cuba, and my father used to read passages of *Don Quixote* to me.

Georgina: Spanish is my mother tongue, so as a small child *Don Quixote* was kind of a children's story character. Later I read some children's adaptations and portions of the book in grammar school and the whole book in high school. But the real connection happened when I read it freely, on my own, later in life. That's when I laughed and wept with it, when I delighted in it and realized its importance.

Q: What about *Miguel's Brave Knight* did you respond to most?

Georgina: I liked very much the structure of the text, this kind of outline or sketch, of short and poetic fragments of the life and dreams of young Cervantes, using always his most famous book as background. But what attracted me most was the use of the language and its music.

I also consider Raúl Colón's illustrations a very important piece that adds harmony to the book as a whole and shares not only the telling of the story, but also the atmosphere, the tone and the poetic essence of the text.

Q: Georgina, did you find any interesting connections between your previous work on *Don Quixote Forever* (2016) and your most recent work on *Miguel's Brave Knight*?

Georgina: Yes, the fact that *Miguel's Brave Knight* is about young Cervantes dreaming about the knight he wants to write about someday and my *Don Quijote para siempre* (*Don Quixote Forever*) and *Don Quijote a carcajadas* (*Don Quixote's Laughter*) are about that same knight as children will see him, makes a connection. The previous works and this translation are intended for young readers and one of the goals of all three is not only to tell a story they will enjoy but also to familiarize them with one the most important books of all times, and to make them appreciate the beauty of our Spanish language.

Q: What does your translation process look like?

Teresa: I read the book in English a few times before I start to work on the translation. Then I proceed to translate page by page. When I have finished the translation, I let it “rest” for a while, then I go back to the translation to see if it sounds right, or if I need to make some changes to the text before submitting the final translation.

Georgina: My translation process looks very much like my writing process. I think about it as part of my work. Although the book is already written, translation demands not only lots of attention to words and language—it involves, contrary to what many people think, imagination and creativity to transmit not only words and ideas, but also feelings and cadence.

To start, I read the original text several times and do some research. If it is poetry, I consider the structure, its rhyme and rhythm. When I’m working sometimes I write down several options for some words. Then, at the end of a verse or a page I read it aloud and choose the one that is closer in meaning to the original, that reproduces better the music of the text, and that delights the most.

Every day, as I do when I’m writing a book, I read what I have done the day before and then go for some more until the end. When the work is finished, I let it stand for several days and read it with “new eyes” later to modify or add, if necessary, the finishing touches. Sometimes translating feels like a challenging game. Like solving crosswords puzzles, translating offers me lots of special moments, knowledge, inspiration, vocabulary, and skills to improve as a writer.

Q: What kind of research, if any, do you conduct in order to select the correct form or context of translation?

Georgina: I read the book several times to be sure I understand it completely and to immerse myself in its tone and atmosphere. Usually I read about the author and some of his or her books and writings to learn more about his or her style and voice.

I also read information in Spanish on the theme of the book to learn more about it and to familiarize myself with its vocabulary.

For *Miguel’s Brave Knight*, I researched about Miguel de Cervantes, especially his childhood and youth, and read again some chapters of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* to focus particularly on the vocabulary and idiomatic expressions of the time and place in which the novel takes place.

Q: What about translating *Miguel’s Brave Knight* was most challenging?

Georgina: I had never translated free verse poetry. When I write, I use the traditional poetic forms. For me it comes naturally and effortless. And it has an advantage: if you follow the rules you are sure to achieve music and rhythm. With free verse it is more subjective. You have to trust the words you choose and your ears to capture the music of the original text. I had never attempted that, so I spent lots of time and effort choosing the right words and reading the text aloud many times, over and over again, to be sure our translation was as delicate, and delightful to the ear as the original.

Teresa: Translating *Miguel’s Brave Knight* was definitely a challenge because of Margarita’s free verse style. However, I believe that Georgina and I were able to accomplish this goal.

Q: Is communication with the author important to your process?

Teresa: I don’t always communicate with the author when doing a translation. I only reach out to the author or the editor if I need to clarify something. In the case of *Miguel y su valiente caballero* I did communicate with Margarita Engle. Her style is so unique that I wanted to make sure that Georgina and I preserved her style and were truthful to her voice.

Georgina: In this case it was not only very important, but advantageous. Teresa knows Margarita Engle and had talked to her and knew what she wanted to achieve and what was in her heart and mind when she wrote the book. A few times we were not sure about a particular word, phrase, or idea. It was a blessing that she was accessible and willing to dispel our doubts.

Q: How many drafts of translation did you produce before the finished product was achieved?

Georgina: Oh! That I cannot tell. Many. Lots. This translation was very different from the others I have done before because I was not working alone.

We assigned ourselves one or two pages each week and we both translated those same few pages. Then each one of us read the work of the other, and chose words, phrases, or even verses of one translation or the other. Sometimes we ended up with a different new page. By this point we already had three or four drafts of a page.

Q: What was it like working with another translator on *Miguel’s Brave Knight*?

Georgina: This translation was very different from all the others I have done. I have worked a lot with Teresa Mlawer but in a different way. Usually I write or translate and she edits. Sometimes I help her with the rhymes and metrics of some of her translations. On this occasion, for the first time, we both worked as translators of the same text. As I have said earlier, we assigned ourselves one or two pages each week and we both translated those same few pages. Then each one read the work of the other, and chose words, phrases or verses from one translation or the other to achieve the best end results. We talked a lot on the phone considering each other's point of view. Sometimes we thought about our differences and options for a few days or even looked for a third opinion.

To write is a solitary work. Working with another person can be a real challenge. I thought it was going to be difficult to work with another translator. Working with Teresa was different, but also stimulating and fun.

Teresa: I have worked with Georgina Lázaro before. We make a good team and complement each other. This was indeed a team effort and a work of love for both Georgina and myself.

Q: How important are cultural appropriateness, language authenticity, and accuracy of locale to the translation of a text such as *Miguel's Brave Knight*? Do you feel it is important to have a Spanish translation of this text?

Teresa: Cultural appropriateness, language authenticity, and accuracy of any text to be translated is extremely important. Because of the subject matter of the story I feel it was extremely important to have this book translated into the language of Miguel de Cervantes.

Georgina: Yes, I think it is important and necessary to have a Spanish translation of this text. Such a beautiful book about the author of the most famous and important book written in Spanish needs to reach Spanish readers.

To take notice of cultural appropriateness, language authenticity, and accuracy of locale is essential to be able to have a trustworthy text, without disparities, and to succeed in getting the reader to feel as if the new text is not a translation.

Q: Is language or intent more important to a work like *Miguel's Brave Knight*?

Teresa: I would say that both are important, but when it comes to Cervantes, the language is extremely important.

Q: What is the crucial difference between authentic literature and translation literature?

Teresa: To me there is no crucial difference between authentic literature and literature in translation, as long as both are well written.

Q: What are some of the differences between translating literature and poetry?

Teresa: Poetry is definitely more of a challenge, especially if you are translating the words of someone as talented and unique as Margarita Engle.

Georgina: To translate an informative text or a cookbook, for example, you have to be meticulous and precise; there's no room for creativity. To translate literature and poetry is more difficult. As in all translations, you have to look for accuracy in the words you choose. But besides meaning you have to consider the sound of the words, the music and the tone they create, the rhythm and cadence of the sentences. Especially with poetry the translated text should be read as a poem written in the new language and the translator becomes kind of a creator. This question makes me think of something actress Marta Poveda says: "To do prose is like running by the beach, to do poetry is like running through water."

Q: What do you enjoy most about translating?

Georgina: What I enjoy most about translating is the challenge and the fun of it. It reminds me of the days I used to solve crosswords puzzles with my father, especially if it involves the rhyme and rhythm of traditional poetic forms. It is like a game, like a riddle. Like this:

What one syllable word rhymes with frown and is the name of a color?

What one syllable word rhymes with team and means yell?

Q: Do you have any advice for aspiring translators?

Teresa: When I look back to my career as a translator I like what I see. It has been and it continues to be a very rewarding experience for me. Therefore, I would say to any aspiring translators: If that's what you really like to do, go for it!

Q: What do you hope to inspire through your work in translation?

Teresa: I have to admit that I do translations because I love language and I love children’s literature. However, my goal is to be able to translate into Spanish many of the wonderful children’s books published in English so that Hispanic children will have the opportunity to read all these books in their language.

Georgina: What I want with my translations is to expose the work of other writers, to make available good books written in English to Spanish-speaking readers or to readers who are learning Spanish. As with my own books I expect children to discover that reading is fun, exciting, and stimulating.

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ABOUT THE TRANSLATORS

Recently chosen as one of the “Top 50 People in Spanish-Language Publishing” by an international network of publishing professionals, Teresa Mlawer is one of the most distinguished and highly celebrated figures in the publishing industry. Teresa has translated over 300 children books for publishers in the US and overseas. She was born in Havana, Cuba and came to the United States in 1962.

Georgina Lázaro was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She studied science and education at the University of Puerto Rico and became a teacher. Georgina has also translated for HarperCollins. Her book, *Federico Garcia Lorca*, was a Pura Belpre Honor Book and an ALSC Notable Book for Children.

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REVIEWS

★ “With the assistance of Mlawer and Lázaro, National Young People’s Poet Laureate Engle brings to children the childhood of the great storyteller Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra in his native tongue....the Spanish translation by Mlawer and Lázaro beautifully captures the rhythm and language of the original.... Colón’s remarkable pen-and-ink-and-watercolor illustrations have an old-masters quality that perfectly complements the narrative... This is a worthy translation of a beautiful and engaging book.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, **STARRED REVIEW**


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updated 5/1/18